13 higher bid is received and validated, (e) at the end of the auction, awarding the item to the user

14 with the highest bid at that point, and (f) subtracting the number of points representing the

15 winning bid from the account of the user who submitted the winning bid.

1 16. (NEW) A system as in Claim 15 further including:

2   a computer program or programs awarding incentive points to users for actions taken by

3 users.

1 17. (NEW) A system as in Claim 16 in which the actions include viewing advertisements.

1 18. (NEW) A system as in Claim 17, in which:

2   the database also stores information relating to the date or time period during which

3 incentive points were earned, and

4   wherein said computer program uses the date or time period information to cause

5 incentive points to be removed from user accounts once a certain period of time has elapsed from

6 the awarding of such points.

1 19. (NEW) A method comprising:

2   (a)   awarding a quantity of incentive points to a first user, including adding the first

3 quantity to a first stored account of first user incentive points;

4   (b)   awarding a quantity of incentive points to a second user, including adding the

5 quantity to a second stored account of second user incentive points;

6   (c)   initiating an on-line auction for an item, including specifying a minimum number

7 of incentive points required for an opening bid;

8   (d)   receiving a first bid from the first user through a communications port;

9   (e)   comparing the first bid against the minimum number and rejecting the first bid if

10 the first bid is less than the minimum number;

11   (f)   comparing the first bid against the number of unreserved incentive points in the

12 first stored account and rejecting the first bid if the first bid is greater than the number of

13 unreserved incentive points in the first stored account;

14   (g)   if the first bid has not been rejected, storing an indication that the first bid is the

15 current high bid and reserving a number of incentive points in the first stored account equal to

16 the amount of the first bid;

17   (h)   receiving a second bid from the second user through a communications port;

18   (i)   comparing the second bid against the current high bid and rejecting the first bid if

19 the first bid is less than the current high bid;

20   (j)   comparing the second bid against the number of unreserved incentive points in the

21 second stored account and rejecting the second bid if the second bid is greater than the number of

22 unreserved incentive points in the second stored account;

23   (k)   if the second bid has not been rejected, storing an indication that the second bid is

24 the current high bid, reserving a number of incentive points in the second stored account equal to

25 the amount of the second bid, and unreserving the first account points previously reserved in step

26 (g);

27   (l)   after receipt of n number of additional bids, closing the auction; and

28   (m)   awarding the item to the user who submitted the highest valid bid as of the close

29 of the auction and deleting from that user's account that number of points reserved in that

30 ~~account as a result of that bid.~~

1 20. (NEW) The method of Claim 19, in which:

2   the step (a) awarding of points occurs as a result of the first user viewing an

3 advertisement.

1 21. (NEW) The method of Claim 19, in which:

2   the step (a) awarding of points occurs as a result of the first user signing up for a service.

1 22. (NEW) The method of Claim 19, in which:

2   the step (a) awarding of points occurs as a result of the first user providing identification

3   information.

1   23. (NEW) A system comprising:

2   a first database or databases including a first entry representing a number of incentive

3   points held by a first user, a second entry representing a number of incentive points held by a

4   second user, a third entry representing a number of incentive points held by the first user which

5   are currently reserved and a fourth entry representing a number of incentive points held by the

6   second user which are currently reserved;

7   a second database or databases including a first entry representing a first item to be

8   auctioned and a second item to be auctioned;

9   a computer program or programs adding incentive points to the first entry when the first

10   user performs actions for which incentive points are awarded and adding incentive points to the

11   second entry when the second user performs actions for which incentive points are awarded;

12   a computer program or programs adding incentive points to the third entry when the first

13   user submits a valid high bid in an auction and adding incentive points to the fourth entry when

14   the second user submits a valid high bid in an auction; and

15   a computer program or programs deleting incentive points from the third entry when a

16   valid bid is received which is higher than the previously high bid submitted by the first user, and

17   deleting incentive points from the fourth entry when a valid bid is received which is higher than

18   the previously high bid submitted by the second user.

1   24. (NEW) A system as in Claim 23, wherein said computer program or programs delete

2   incentive points from the first entry and from the second entry after the passage of a duration of

3   time.

1   25. (NEW) A system as in Claim 24, in which:

2   the actions for which incentive points are awarded include viewing advertisements.

26. (NEW) A system as in Claim 25, in which:

the first database or databases further includes a fifth entry representing a number of incentive points not owned by the first user but available as credit to that user.

27. (NEW) A point-based auction system comprising:

a database storing a first account representing a number of incentive points awarded to a first user and a second account representing a number of incentive points awarded to a second user;

a communications port operatively connected to the first user and the second user;

a computer program or programs taking as input reserve amounts and bids received from the first user and the second user through the communications port, each reserve amount representing the maximum number of incentive points reserved for an auction, and each bid constituting a number of incentive points and relating to an item being auctioned, said program (a) checking each reserve amount against the database to confirm that the user submitting the bid owns at lest the number of incentive points specified in the reserve amount, (b) subtracting the reserve amount from each user's respective account, (c) checking each bid against the database to confirm that the amount in the bid is less than the amount in the reserve amount, (d) storing information identifying the current high bid, (e) unreserving the points specified in the reserve amount once a higher bid is received and validated, and (f) at the end of the auction, awarding the item to the user with the highest bid at that point.

28. (NEW) The system of claim 27, wherein the program or programs further comprises (g) subtracting the number of points representing the winning bid from the reserve amount to generate an unreserved amount, and (h) adding the unreserved amount to the amount of incentive points in the account of the user who submitted the winning bid.

29. (NEW) A method comprising:

2   (a)   initiating an on-line auction for an item, including specifying a minimum number

3   of incentive points required for an opening bid;

4   (b)   receiving a first bid from a first user through a communications port;

5   (c)   comparing the first bid against the minimum number and rejecting the first bid if

6   the first bid is less than the minimum number; and

7   (d)   comparing the first bid against the number of unreserved incentive points in the

8   first stored account and rejecting the first bid if the first bid is greater than the number of

9   unreserved incentive points in the first stored account.

1   30. (NEW) The method of claim 29, further comprising:

2   (e)   if the first bid has not been rejected, storing an indication that the first bid is the

3   current high bid and reserving a number of incentive points in the first stored account equal to

4   the amount of the first bid.

1   31. (NEW) The method of claim 30, further comprising:

2   (f)   receiving a second bid from the second user through a communications port;

3   (g)   comparing the second bid against the current high bid and rejecting the first bid if

4   the first bid is less than the current high bid; and

5   (h)   comparing the second bid against the number of unreserved incentive points in the

6   second stored account and rejecting the second bid if the second bid is greater than the number of

7   unreserved incentive points in the second stored account.

1   32. (NEW) The method of claim 31, further comprising:

2   (i)   if the second bid has not been rejected, storing an indication that the second bid is

3   the current high bid, reserving a number of incentive points in the second stored account equal to

4   the amount of the second bid, and unreserving the first account points previously reserved in step

5   (e).

1   33. (NEW) The method of claim 32, further comprising:

2   (j)   after receipt of n number of additional bids, closing the auction; and

3   (k)   awarding the item to the user who submitted the highest valid bid as of the close

4   of the auction and deleting from that user's account that number of points reserved in that

5   account as a result of that bid.

1   34. (NEW) The method of claim 29, further comprising:

2   awarding a quantity of incentive points to a first user, including adding the first quantity

3   to a first stored account of first user incentive points; and

4   awarding a quantity of incentive points to a second user, including adding the quantity to

5   a second stored account of second user incentive points.

1   35. (NEW) The method of Claim 34, in which:

2   the step of awarding of points occurs as a result of the first user viewing an

3   advertisement.

1   36. (NEW) The method of Claim 34, in which:

2   the step of awarding of points occurs as a result of the first user signing up for a service.

1   37. (NEW) The method of Claim 34, in which:

2   the step of awarding of points occurs as a result of the first user providing identification

3   information.